



NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota Prepared to Vaccinate Smallpox Response Teams

BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. John Hoeven announced today that North Dakota is prepared to implement the state's smallpox vaccination plan as directed by President Bush.

As part of a national effort to guard against a potential bioterrorism attack, President Bush directed that smallpox vaccine be offered to the nation's military and teams of healthcare workers.

"Protecting the public is our highest priority," Hoeven said. "In the event of an intentional release of the smallpox virus, we must be prepared. Preparedness, prevention and response are key to protecting our state."

Vaccination of teams of healthcare workers is the first of a three-phase federal immunization plan. Phase I would include vaccinating teams of doctors, nurses, epidemiologists and other private and public healthcare workers. Phase II would expand the offer of vaccine to all healthcare and public safety workers. Phase III would offer smallpox vaccination to everyone else on a voluntary basis.

"Smallpox vaccination before a confirmed smallpox case or outbreak will protect healthcare workers and response teams from smallpox disease," said State Health Officer Terry Dwelle, M.D. "These vaccinated teams then can rapidly take actions necessary to protect the public, including identifying people who need to be vaccinated to control an outbreak as well as establishing vaccination clinics."

Smallpox is a contagious viral disease characterized by a high fever and rash. In most cases, smallpox is spread from one person to another by close contact. Although the majority of smallpox patients recover, 30 percent will die from the disease.

If the vaccine is given within four days after an individual is exposed to smallpox, it can prevent illness or lessen its severity.

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The federal government is not recommending vaccination for the general public at this time. “If a case of smallpox is detected, however, we are prepared to vaccinate anyone who is exposed to the disease,” Dwelle said. “The United States currently has sufficient quantities of the vaccine for every person in the country in an emergency.”

“North Dakota’s private and public healthcare professionals have risen to public health challenges in the past, and they are rising to the challenge again today,” Hoeven said. “Their efforts will ensure that we have the very best procedures in place to protect the citizens of our state.”

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Please note: Fact sheets and other information about smallpox can be found on the following websites:

- North Dakota Department of Health – www.health.state.nd.us
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox/reference/resource-kit.asp
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – www.hhs.gov/smallpox/